THE Infallibility OF THE CHURCH OF ROME Examined and Confuted. IN A LETTER TO A Roman Priest.

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A Letter to a Prieſt of the Roman Church, *wherein the Grounds of their pretended* Infallibilities *are called for and examined, in ſome Queries.*

SIR,

WHatever our differences be in many points of Religion, we agree in this, *That it is the great concern of Mankind to examin well the grounds that lead him to his belief in matters of ſo high a nature.* You always tell me, *That out of the true Catholick Church there is no ſalvation*; adding, *That this Catholick Church is the Roman*: though this ſeems to be a Bull as plainly as a general particular. Indeed ſo ſevere a Certificate makes me look to my ſelf: I confeſs this method of dealing with me ſeems not ſo fair nor rational. For if any man ſtudy to draw me into a deſign, by telling me, *That as I muſt ingage in it all I am Maſter of; ſo I muſt ſurrender up the conduct of it to others, of whoſe honeſty, induſtry, and diſcretion I muſt not doubt*; I preſently apprehend a trappan, and you will not diſpute it much that he deſerves to be coſened, who ſuffers himſelf to be impoſed upon ſo groſly. But certainly if my ſoul be more valuable than my eſtate, and if eternity be preferrable to the vaniſhing ſhadows here below, then I have great reaſon to be ſtrongly prejudiced againſt thoſe, who would oblige me to hazard my ſoul in a tame and blind

ſubjection to the Dictates of any man, or Society of men; Reaſon being the only part of our Nature that was born to Liberty, and can defie all the ſevere rigours of Tyranny. You will eaſily believe I cannot be induced on ſlight grounds to forgo this deareſt and moſt eſſential piece of my brother-right. And believe me it was enough that the Roman Church for a Succeſſion of ſome Ages was Miſtris of the Crowns and Empires of her Vaſſals, and had the diſpoſe of the Lives and Goods of the better part of *Europe*. This was highly ſevere though Conſcience had been left free. The Law makes my Houſe my Sanctuary, but if I ſtir abroad I muſt be at my hazard: So whatever Power the Civil Magiſtrates, or the Guides of the Church may have over my Actions, or profeſſion of my Faith, yet as long as it keeps within my head and breaſt, its natural dwelling place, it is a violation of the ſacredneſs of that Sanctuary to invade it there, or make it priſoner. And when I further conſider that Reaſon is nothing but a communication of Divine Light, to make me underſtand thoſe Propoſitions, of which ſome hints were born with my Soul, and the reſt are offered to me in Sacred Writings; if I throw off this, and betake my ſelf to the Dictates of others, I exchange the Sun for the Moon, and the Day for the Twilight; and renounce the liberty of the ſervants of God for a bondage that excludes the freedom of a thought. And, at leaſt, if I were to come under ſo heavy a yoke, I muſt before-hand be well aſſured of the ſacredneſs of the Maſters of my Faith. No man can be wheedled to truſt himſelf to any, of whoſe fidelity and good conduct he is not well aſſured; but he that commits himſelf to noted and known Impoſtors, is the object of all mens ſcorn. He muſt therefore have a great

great opinion of his own Rhethorick, and of my easiness that attempts to perswade me to subject my belief to the Verdict of a Succession of men, who do not so much as pretend to high learning, much less to be eminent Saints; and in whom I can discern no great Characters, but of Temporal Authority, and high pretensions to an uncontrouled Jurisdiction; and neither of these can with any reason determine my belief for one unerring Judg. But since I observe both from my own knowledg, and what I hear by others, that you of the Mission place your greatest strength in the Authority and Infallibility of your Church, and ply every body most with it, I have therefore considered this with all the application of mind I am Master of, as the fundamental Article of your belief. For if your Church be priviledged from error, all her Decrees must certainly pass for Oracles, and there is no disputing them: but if she be subject to error, she is the boldest Impostures that ever appeared in the World, who dares pretend to an unerring assistance in all her decisions, without good ground. Suffer me therefore to offer you a few Queries, of which when I am satisfyingly resolved, I will be brought so much nearer a belief, from which as long as these difficulties lie in my way, I must confess my self at a great distance.

1. And first let me ask you, *What necessity there is of an Infallible Judg, to whose Decrees all must yield absolute obedience?* If you convince me this is necessary, I shall without difficulty yield to you that there is such a Judicatory, since I am perswaded our blessed Saviour who loved his Church so dearly as to die for her, would certainly provide her with all that was necessary for her preservation. But here I know you triumph in the sup-

ſuppoſed neceſſity of ſuch a Judg, without whom there is no preſerving either Truth or Peace: For if there be not a Court to whoſe Award all muſt ſtand, then every man is at liberty to believe as he will, and there is no end of errors: Which appears plainly in the Churches that have thrown off the *Roman* Authority, but are ſubdivided into many fractions, which are the natural reſults of their opinions; for if every man muſt ſearch the Scriptures, and believe what he thinks is the ſenſe of them, then, according to the variety of mens complexions, educations, or inclinations, there ſhall be a numberleſs variety of opinions. And if none have authority over the perſwaſions of others, they cannot be blamed, much leſs condemned for their opinions. This ſeems ſuch an inconvenience, that the Church muſt be in a very bad condition, if there be no remedy for it. This, Sir, I ſuppoſe is in ſhort the ſtrength of all you will alledge on this head: but all this does not prevail with me to acknowledge an *Infallible Judicatory*: for to live well is the chief end of Religion, and to think and believe aright is a neceſſary mean for that end: from which I infer, That if there be no neceſſity of an *Infallible Power* to make men live well, neither is there any for making us think aright; and certainly vice and immorality is as oppoſite to the deſigns of the Goſpel as error: now it is confeſſed there are no certain and infallible ways of reſtraining vice. And if it muſt needs be a defect in the Conſtitution of the Church, if there be no infallible means to reſtrain error, what muſt I conclude if there be no infallible reſtraint on vice; but that the Church wants a main and neceſſary complement, without which ſhe cannot be perfect, and well ſecured; and you know St. *Paul* reckons

kons Hereſies among the works of the Fleſh. Now what reaſon is it, that of all the works of the fleſh, proviſion ſhould only be againſt Hereſie? Therefore I freely acknowledge, that as God has left the Will at liberty, that ſo the glory of his Saints might be the greater, ſerving him not by conſtraint, but willingly; ſo he hath alſo left our Reaſons free to judge of things propoſed to us, whether they be true or falſe. Nor indeed can we believe but as our Reaſons are convinced, for we cannot put a force on our perſwaſion. And ſince our Saviour told us it was impoſſible but that Offences muſt come, ſo I allow it impoſſible but that Errors ſhould come for the greater trial of ſound and true Believers. And I muſt add, that Religion conſiſts in a few plain things, in which if a man bring along with him a ſincere and pure mind, he is ſure not to err mortally. He may be miſtaken in ſome particular opinions, which though they paſs for matters of Religion, yet are as extrinſick to it as the various Hypatheſes in Philoſophy are. I acknowledge every body ought to have that humble miſtruſt of themſelves, and reverence to the Church wherein they were born, as not to be eaſily engaged in new opinions, and ought to be very well aſſured both of the truth and importance of any new Doctrine, before they receive it; and much more before they broach and vent it, to the diſturbance of the peace of the Society they live in. And who ſo without a very clear aſſurance, after the diligent application of his thoughts, having purified his mind in the exerciſe of mortification and ſelf denial, doth obtrude new Doctrines on the World is highly guilty in the ſight of God, for renting the body, and breaking the unity of the Church: But if one after a ſevere inquiry, and

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all due preparation be clearly convinced of any truth, how generally ſoever it be either unknown, or derived, he may, nay, cannot chuſe but muſt believe it. But though this aſſurance may warrant his private departing from the received opinion, yet his aſſurance muſt be full, and his Call clear before he offer his opinion to others. But in that caſe I acknowledge the Guides of the Church may, and ought to conſider ſuch opinions, and paſs a Cenſure on them according to the Scriptures; which (flowing from perſons whoſe Character makes them both more particularly devoted to God, and more converſant in Sacred Writings; and, as it is to be ſuppoſed, are by the purity of their minds qualified for a higher ſenſe of divine truth, and by their exemplary lives are poſſeſſed of the eſteem of thoſe over whom they are ſet) will undoubtedly have great influence on all ſerious and ſober perſons, yet ſuch as are convinced that their deciſions are contrary to the Scriptures muſt ſtill believe God rather than man. But in that caſe the Magiſtrate may ſecure the peace of the Society, by obliging them either to reſt quiet with their Opinions, or to go out of his Dominions. The Church may alſo by excommunicating them preſerve others from being infected by their miſperſwaſions. And thus, except you give me better proof, I am not convinced there is a neceſſity of any *Infallible Judge* for deciding Controverſies; and neither for the ſalvation of ſouls, nor for the peace of the Society of Chriſtians. Not for the firſt, ſince no Propoſition is clearer than this, That every Chriſtian who ſtudies to be well informed in divine matters, and ſincerely follows his Conſcience, ſhall certainly be ſaved. Nor is this *Infallible Judge* neceſſary for the

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Society ſince thoſe who have the Legiſlative Power, whether Civil, or Eccleſiaſtick, may govern a Society well though they be not Infallible, ſo that the Church may have an Authority, though not infallible, and yet ſufficient to ſecure her peace.

2. My ſecond Queſtion ſhall be, *whether there be really ſuch an Infallible Judge on Earth*? For though this be not neceſſary, yet I ſhall not deny but our Saviour, according to that overflowing love he bears his Church, may have provided Her with this ſecurity againſt Error. But herein I muſt crave your pardon to tell you, I am very apt to think there is no ſuch Court on Earth, for in all extraordinary things, to which our aſſent is craved, the means of conveying, or rather impoſing, ſuch belief (ſince no man of a ſtrong mind will eaſily credit an extraordinary thing, eſpecially that which ſubjects to it the very freedom of his thoughts) muſt have an Evidence and Authority proportioned to the Greatneſs and Importance of that they recommend to our Faith. And therefore when God ſent *Moſes* to deliver his People, and be their Guide, he gave him a power of working ſuch mighty Works, which, being done in the ſight of both *Egyptians* and *Iſraelites*, might convince both one and t'other that there was an extraordinary Authority communicated to him, he alſo told the *Iſraelites* to demand a Sign or Wonder from every pretender to Propheſie, or Divine Miſſion; And becauſe the power of evil Spirits is undoubtedly far beyond ours; ſo that many extraordinary things may be performed by Magick and evil Arts, therefore *Moſes* (*Deut.*xiii.) allows even the People of *Iſrael* a previous judgment of the Doctrine of any Pretender to Propheſie, before they acknowledged his Authority,

or were wrought on by his Sign or Wonder. We find also the Prophets, either by Miracles or Predictions, proving their Divine Authority. And though the History of all the Prophets is not so full, as to give us an account of the Signs or Wonders of each of them, yet we have no reason to doubt but they did follow the Rule prescribed by *Moses*, which indeed natural Religion teacheth all men. Therefore when our Saviour appeared, as he proved himself the *Messias*, by the completion of the Prophesies in his Person, he made it also appear by the purity of his Doctrine, and the Authority of his Miracles, wrought in the sight of his Enemies as well as Followers. The same Method was observed by the Apostles, as appeared from their Acts and Epistles. And it is certain that as no man can be witness in his own cause, so no mans, or company of mens pretence to an infallible Jurisdiction, must engage me to believe it, otherwise there were no end of Impostors. Therefore I must conclude, That except you can shew me a Succession of men who, by some clear demonstrations of an unerring Spirit, and divine Authority, prove themselves Infallibly directed, and uncontroulably assisted by God, I am not obliged to submit my self to any as such. Nor is it to any good purpose to say, That because there was a Succession of High Priests under *Moses* Law, who, by the Oracle in the Pectoral, did authoritatively decide all Controversies, therefore we may be well assured that under the clearer illumination of the Gospel, we are not left to the uncertainties of our own conjectures. But there must be a great High Priest of Christendom for judging all Controversies. But if this be well considered it will not advance your pretences a whit; for the Jews were

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in all their Political Affairs, in their Commerce and Treaties with Foreiners, in their Government at home, and in the matters of Peace and War, to be determined by the Judiciary Laws *Moſes* gave them; and as they enjoyed the Land of *Canaan* by that Law, which was then *Magna Charta*, ſo they were in all Civil matters to be judged by the Law of *Moſes*. Now ſince no Law can give proviſions for all emergents, there was a neceſſity of a conſtant Expoſition of that Law in all dubious caſes. And therefore God was pleaſed to continue this among them by the *Urim* and *Thummim*. Their Worſhip was alſo made up of a multitude of particular Rites, and many caſes occurring in theſe of great intricacy, God continued that extraordinary Preſence among them. But nothing of this was neceſſary under the Goſpel, in which the policy of the ſeveral States is left to be determined according to the Laws of Nature, and the ſeveral Humors, Cuſtoms and Intereſts of Nations. Our Belief is alſo plain, and our Worſhip ſimple, ſo that none of theſe things remain that made an Infallible deciſion neceſſary under the Old Teſtament. And beſides, the myſteriouſneſs of the Communication, and the plain expreſs words of the Inſtitution, do ſhew the difference betwixt that, and any thing can be pretended to under this new and more perfect diſpenſation. *Moſes* plainly told them what that ſeries of men ſhould be, and of whom deſcended; he alſo declared how they were to inquire Counſel from God, and how all muſt ſubmit to their Sentence. Nor was the High Prieſt by his Character veſted with this Authority, but when he put on the Ephod, and went in before the cloud of glory, and brought back the ſacred reſponſe. Now the exactneſs *Moſes* obſerved in deli-

vering that ſeems convincing, that when God intended to bring any part of mankind under that ſubjection, he delivered his Commiſſion to theſe ſo impowred, in ſo formal and ſolemn a manner, that it was not to be diſputed but by one that rejected the Law of *Moſes*. From which I preſume I may infer, That if God had ſet up ſuch Anthority in the Chriſtian Church, the Inſtitution had been expreſs, the perſons clearly deſigned their Succeſſion as plainly pointed out, to have put ſo great a matter beyond diſpute. So that the manner of the divine emanations of unerring direction had been as clear as it was of old. Now ſince I meet nothing of this in the whole New Teſtament, I ſee no reaſon to make me believe it is as you pretend: For what you infer from our Saviours words to St. *Peter* from his ſaying, *Tell the Church*, and from his promiſes of the *Holy Ghoſt*, will never conclude that you pretend to: For before you can oblige me to believe any thing from theſe Premiſes, you muſt allow me to acknowledge the ſacredneſs of the Books wherein theſe words are, ſo that my belief of the Scriptures ſhall not depend on the deciſion of the Church, but ſhall rather lead me to acknowledge its Authority. You muſt alſo allow me to believe theſe Scriptures are to be ſo expounded, before I own the Authority of the Church to be abſolute; ſince from them you bind me to believe it. Therefore I muſt expound them ſo as may agree beſt both with the plain literal ſenſe of the words, and the deſign on which they are ſet down, by all which you allow me the Expoſition of Scripture. Now if I may expound it in ſome places, why not in all that is indiſpenſably neceſſary to ſalvation? And your Churches claiming that Authority to her ſelf muſt not oblige me

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to believe it a whit the more, unleſs by ſome other cogent reaſons I be bound to it: for none muſt be both Judg and Party, and no mans aſſertion muſt paſs for proof in his own caſe; and yet the very places you alledg come far ſhort of what ſeems requiſite on ſuch an occaſion: for whatever may be ſaid of St. *Peter*, which I ſhall not now inquire into, where have we any formal account who ſhall be his Succeſſors, what ſhall be neceſſary to make any ſuch, and by what means they ſhall come by theſe infallible directions. And indeed I can ſee no reaſon to think that had there been ſuch an Inſtitution in the Goſpel, the ſame goodneſs which moved our bleſſed Saviour to provide ſo well for his Church, ſhould not likewiſe have drawn from him ſuch an explicit account of it in all circumſtances, as was neceſſary for ſetting the thing beyond diſpute, and ſecuring any ſuch Court in their Authority by an expreſs conſtitution of it in its Members, and a Declaration of their power, ſuch as *Moſes* gave the People of Iſrael in the obedience due to the reſponſes of *Urim* and *Thummim*.

3. My third Queſtion ſhall be, ſuppoſing an Infallible Church, *How ſhall I be directed in my ſearch for it, ſo as to find it out*? For the ſeveral Societies that name the name of Chriſt, being ſo broken off from one another, to which of all theſe muſt I addreſs my ſelf for a deciſion in all Articles of Faith? When I conſider the beginings of Chriſtianity, that it firſt aroſe in *Jeruſalem*, and did ſpread moſt in the Eaſt: when I alſo conſider that the Eaſtern Churches had moſt Confeſſors and Martyrs in the Ages of perſecution; and

and had also the greatest interest in the four first and best General Councils, as appears from the Subscriptions, where the Western Bishops were scarce the twentieth part. When I add to this how undisputed their Succession is, and how long they have kept the profession of the Christian Faith, amidst all the severities and cruelties of the Saracens and Mahometans, under whose bondage they continue to this day, I am tempted to seek this Judge there: but when I see in what ignorance they live, and how the pressures they groan under, though they have not prevailed on them to renounce the name of Christ, yet have brought them to a degenerate means, which I love not to dwell on, nor aggravate, since the circumstances they are in plead pity rather than scorn or disdain; I am forced to turn away from them: but if I look Western, I see a Church triumphing indeed in outward splendor, their Worship is solemn and magnificent, their Priest in great esteem, and their High Priest culminates in Glory and Power; but after all this I cannot see what must oblige me to an implicit belief to every thing this Church imposes on me, since the Piety to which she pretends, is either immured in her Cloysters, or appears only in faces and outward postures of devotion: but after my most impartial inquiries, I can see no reason to esteem the Head of this Church a Saint, or such a Clerk, that I must adore his person, and submit to his Decrees. And if there be not some strange charm in his Chair, I cannot force on my self a belief of his being inspired. How then I must be directed to find this infallible Umpire of all differences? If you

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ſend me to a Succeſſion, you give me a hard task to labour in, and when I have found it, it is no more but what all muſt allow to be in the *Greek* Church. And I cannot ſee any thing in the Scriptures of the Biſhops of *Rome*: ſo I am at a loſs for want of ſome good directions and clear characters of this *Infallible Judge*.

4. My fourth queſtion is, *In what perſon or perſons of the* Roman Church *this* Infallibility *doth reſt?* If you tell me in a Council, then I muſt ask you, Where this Council is to be found? for all your arguments perſwade the neceſſity of a living ſpeaking Judg; therefore I would gladly be ſatisfied in what City or corner of the World this Council ſits; for if you ſend me to the Decrees of the Councils, this overthrows all your own grounds, from which you plead againſt the Authority of the Scriptures; and if I go to any Writings, why not to the Scriptures, rather than the Decrees of Councils: for every one that has compared them will find a plain ſimplicity in the one, and much of the ſubtlety of Metaphyſicks, and the nicety of School terms in the other.

5. My fifth Queſtion is, *What grounds there are for believing this ſuppoſed Infallibility, tied to the collective Body of the Church, and that it is not rather ſpread over the whole diffuſive Body of the Chriſtian World?* For if the Church be only infallible when gathered in a Council, then as there was no Infallibility in the Church for three Ages, ſo it was afterwards ſubject to the pleaſure of the Emperors, who called Councils when they would, and is now wholly in the Popes hands: And as it was in the powet of the Emperor, ſo it is

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now in the Popes, to ſuppreſs this infallible Authority, which is thus ſubject to outward accidents; and muſt live or die at the pleaſure of the Popes and Emperors. And indeed the Popes have taken up ſuch jealouſies of general Councils, that the World is not like to be troubled with more of them.

6. *If this Infallibility be ſpread among all Chriſtians, I am not a whit nearer the reſolution I deſire; for when they differ in ſo many opinions, how ſhall I know which of them are in the right? muſt I travel all the Chriſtian World over to examine of which ſide the greateſt number is?* This is our endleſs labour, therefore I muſt have a ſhorter way to work.

7. *Who of all the Societies of Chriſtians muſt have the intereſt to meet and give vote in a Council? muſt all the Lays be excluded, and only the Clergy be admitted?* I muſt tell you I ſee no reaſon for throwing out the Laity. You know the Epiſtles wherein St. *Paul* gives the Rules for the Order and Government of the Churches, are directed to all the Saints and faithful in the Churches: by which it ſeems they were to have an intereſt in the Government, as well as their Paſtors. We are ſure among the Jews the Sanhedrim that judged in all things Civil and Eccleſiaſtical, was not only made up of Prieſts, and that the High-Prieſt himſelf was no Member of it by his Office, unleſs he were choſen to be of the number: nor can I find any thing in the New Teſtament, that excludes the Laity. On the contrary, the Promiſes of the Holy Ghoſt are made to all that believe without exception, and all Chriſtians are called a Royal Prieſthood: and in the firſt Council at *Jeruſalem*, the Brethren concur'd in the Deciſi-

Deciſion and Synodal Epiſtle, with the Apoſtles and Elders.

8. Suppoſing none but theſe in Orders be admitted to a General Council, then what intereſt muſt they have there, ſhall all be alike, or muſt the Biſhops only have a Suffrage? You muſt give good authority for this before all muſt ſubmit to it. It is not determined in Scriptures, in the Council of *Jeruſalem* the Presbyters had a Suffrage; ſo it continued in the firſt Ages of the Church. We find the Presbyters ſubſcribing in many Provincial and National Councils: Why muſt they be allowed there, and excluded in a General Council, it being only an Aſſembly of all National Councils? But if Biſhops only muſt vote in Councils, by what warrant do Cardinals as ſuch vote in your General Councils, ſince as Cardinals they are only the Presbyters and Deacons of *Rome*. Abbots alſo, though but Prieſts, get a Vote in the Weſtern Councils: for as Abbots they cannot pretend to a Divine Character or inſtitution, and if as Prieſts they vote in your Councils, why are not all Prieſts allowed the ſame privilege.

9. How ſhall I be aſſured a Council thus conſtituted is infallible, eſpecially if I ſee or be told by the Hiſtorians of both ſides, that all things are managed in this Council by factious Parties and intrigues? each Party ſtudying to wait opportunities when they may carry a Vote, and bringing all of their faction to the Council. This was plainly the caſe at *Trent*, as even *Pallavicini* repreſents it. And you will hardly prevail on any who has conſidered a little what the direction of the Holy Ghoſt is, to make him believe

that in a packt Meeting, where all is full of cunning and design, the Holy Ghost must be ever ready to direct them when they go to the Vote, and that this shall only be when the Bishops are in their Formalities at a Session, and not in a Congregation, which is the Council resolved in a Grand Committee. I know, Sir, our House of Commons understands this distinction; but what grounds have you to pretend to it, where all are acted by an infallible direction.

10. *Whether must the whole Council agree in a Decision, or the major part determine?* I know you choose the latter; but it is not easie to make any body hope that the greater part of any Assembly must be the better and wiser part, since we see it is most commonly otherwise. I know this must be the rule in a Court, that determines any thing by equal Suffrages; but if a Jury must all agree in the disposal of my life, it were but reason that all should also agree in the determining my faith, which upon the matter is the disposal of my soul. And I know no reason to believe the Holy Ghost will certainly assist the major part more than that he will assist every person that is allowed a Suffrage in the Council.

11. How shall I know what is a General Council, what not? for I find great numbers of Bishops have run together, and flatly contradicted one another. The *Nicene* Council decreed, the Son was of the same substance with the Father: this was rejected by many other Councils, some decreeing he was of a like substance with the Father, others that he was of a different substance from the Father; how shall I know

know to which of these Decisions I must submit my self. The Histories give account of these Councils as called by the same Authority, for all were summoned by the Emperors Writ, all are represented to have been General Councils, and we are told of a greater appearance of Bishops in some of them than were at *Nice*: which of these must therefore determin my faith?

12. What reason have I to believe any Council is general, from which all the *Greek* and *Eastern* Bishops are excluded upon so slight a pretence, as that they believe the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father by the Son, and not from the Father and the Son, and that in their rooms then are substituted a great many mock Bishops, who are neither Canonically elected for these places, nor perform any part of the Pastoral charge in their pretended Dioceses, but are onely named by the Popes, and brought to Councils to make so many Votes?

13. Suppose the Pope give out a general summons for all Bishops, can this be more than a Meeting of all within his Patriarchate? for on what grounds can he pretend a right to summon his fellow Patriarchs, who by the Councils of *Nice*, *Constantinople*, and *Chalcedon* are declared equal to him: and therefore since the Emperors in the primitive times summoned their whole Empire to a General Council, they did it by their own Authority, as appears by all the Acts and Synodal Epistles of the first General Councils. What power then hath the Pope to call this great Meeting of the Church. And even these General Councils the Emperors called seem onely

to have been the Councils of the *Roman* Empire, called Oecumeneal, as the *Romans* called their Empire, ὁικουμένη. For the Christians of *India*, and the more remote parts of *Asia* were called to none of these Councils, nor could the Emperours Writ reach them.

14. Suppose the Popes Writ goes over all Christendom, must all the Bishops come to the Council or not? Or what number is necessary? If we examine the Subscriptions of the first Councils, what ever reverence we justly have for their decisions, we cannot call them Oecumenical, since there were so few Bishops from the Western Churches in them. Nor do I see a reason to convince me that a whole Province or Nation can depute a few to represent them; such Plenipotentiaries may do well in Political matters, but in a Judicatory that pretends to Infallibility, you must give me a good Warrant before I believe such a deputation can inspire one with more degrees of Infallibility. The Bishops of a *Province* can indeed send their decisions by any of their number, but this is not the method of Councils, where every Bishop hath but one suffrage, though but one from a Nation, though another Method was used at *Basil*. But in the case that a Prince is so dissatisfied with the Pope, that he will suffer none of his Bishops to appear at the Council, as it was in the Translation of the Council of *Trent* to *Bologna*, to which the Emperour would suffer none of his Bishops to go; and after that in the next Session at *Trent*, to which the French King would permit none of his Bishops to go; Whether can such a meeting be called a general Council, or not?

not? No man can be obliged to that which is not in his power, and he cannot forfeit his right becauſe of a force on his Perſon: Nor can it be a free Council to which all have not free acceſs. Thoſe alſo who live at a great diſtance from the place where the Council ſits, and either through Infirmity, or Poverty, cannot perform the Journey, are in a hard caſe: For that which is morally impoſſible cannot be overcome. If then the meeting muſt be of all the Biſhops, I do not ſee ſuch a Conſtitution is practicable, or how all the Biſhops can be brought together. And if the Infallibility be ſpread among all, no reaſon can perſwade me that a packt Meeting can have the power of the whole becauſe the Writ was general.

15. The Biſhops in their deciſions either go upon immediate Inſpiration, or judge, as men, according to the Premiſes laid before them. I know you do not pretend to the former, but if you did, I would ask you what grounds there were to believe this? For if you gave any good ones I ſhould ſubmit to the ſuffrage of every ſingle Biſhop, ſince every perſon Inſpired muſt be Maſter of my belief. And why ſhould this Inſpiration reſt on ſome, and not on all, ſince all bear the ſame Character? But I inſiſt no longer on this, becauſe I know you reject it. If then they judge as rational men from the reaſons that are laid before them, why may not other perſons examine thoſe Reaſons as well as they? If an Inſpired perſon ſpeak to me in the name of God, I muſt ſubmit to him; but if he ſpeak not by Commandment, but by permiſſion, then it is not the Lord, but

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he that ſpeaks: And though I owe great reverence to him, as to one that has obtained grace to be faithful, yet I may examine what he ſays in that ſtile. Therefore if they proceed according to the Rules of Diſcourſe and Reaſon, I preſume I may make bold to examine both the truth of the Premiſes, and the Concluſions they drew from them: Since as there can be no more ſtrength in the Concluſion than was in the Premiſes, ſo the light of Nature and Reaſon directs me to know what is a well deduced Concluſion.

16. Whether can that be called a free Council where the Biſhops have ſworn obedience to the Biſhops of *Rome*, contrary to their Liberties, and the Primitive practice? In which time all the Biſhops pretended an equality in their Character, and called the Biſhops of *Rome* their Colleagues, their Brethren, and fellow-Biſhops, and treated them as Equals in their freedom with them, as appears from the Inſtances of *Irenius*, *Cyprian*, and the Conteſt of the *African* Biſhops concerning Appeals to the See of *Rome*. Nor did they yield him any other ſubjection but what practice had brought in by reaſon of the eminence of that City, which was then Miſtris of the World; and becauſe they alſo believed St. *Peter* and St. *Paul* had founded it with their Labours and Bloud. But theſe Biſhops who have ſo ſordidly and meanly given up their rights to that high Pretender, and have ſworn obedience to him, cannot be the proper Judges and Repreſentatives of a Church, whoſe Liberties they have abandoned, I had almoſt ſaid betrayed.

17. Whe-

17. Whether muſt I believe the Decrees of a General Council before they are approved by the Pope, or not? If the Council be infallible in her Decrees, then I am bound to ſubmit to them, for all the Popes rejecting them: But if the Council be fallible, then the Popes ratification cannot make the Decrees of the Council Infallible. For things cannot change their natures, and if the Vote of the Council was by an Infallible direction, then there is no abſolute neceſſity of a ratification; and if it was fallible, the Authority of the Decree muſt be reſolved ſimply into the Popes infallibility. For the ratification that is ſubſequent to the Councils Vote puts no more authority in the Council than it had when it paſſed the Vote. It is true in matters of Policy I know there be ſuch Conſtitutions, which is the caſe of the Votes of our two Houſes of Parliament, that have no force without the *Le Roy le veut*; but if the Council be infallibly directed, then it is not in the Popes power to reject their Deciſions. And if the Council be fallible, then the Infallibility reſts in the Pope alone, and who ſhall expect I can think the Council of *Conſtance* infallible in taking the Chalice from the Laity, and fallible in ſubjecting the Pope to the Council. Certainly, the Authority was the ſame in both, but becauſe the Pope was a party in the one particular, he was ſure not to ratifie it.

18. Who muſt be the Infallible Expounder of the Decrees of Councils? If you will leave this to every private perſon, then all theſe inconveniences will follow that you object againſt private perſons expounding Scripture. For they may be drawn to ſeveral

ral meanings and opinions. And we know that at *Trent*, when the Divines differed in many Points of Religion, the great buſineſs was to find a temper, and to contrive the Decree in ſuch general terms, as might diſpleaſe neither Party. And thence it was that two of the Divines that were in the Council, and diſputed in the Points defined, but differed in their Opinions, after the Council had paſſed the Decree, did publiſh Treatiſes for their Opinions, both of them pretending the Council decreed of his ſide: And though this was done before the diſſolution of the Council, yet the Council took no notice of it. By which it ſeems they deſigned their Decrees ſhould be Oracles, as well for their miſterious Ambiguity, as for their Authority. Where then ſhall we find a Judge of Controverſies concerning the true meaning of the Decrees of Councils? If you put this in the Popes hands, you give all up to him, and ſo the Decrees of the Council ſhall ſignifie no more than he is pleaſed to allow them.

19. When new Controverſies ariſe among Chriſtians, to whom muſt they go for deciſion? Muſt they reſt on the Popes definition? Then all the power is in his Perſon. Or muſt they ſtay for a deciſion from the Council? If this laſt be ſetled on, then I am afraid you Romaniſts are in as great a hazard as we are to have your Controverſies endleſs. For ever ſince the Council of *Conſtance* the Popes have ſuch mortal jealouſies of Councils, that the World is not like to ſee more of them. We have ſeen none now above a hundred years, and the very thoughts of one are laid to ſleep; and yet this is not for want of reaſon

ſon to call a Council: For there be great Controverſies that do very much divide you, but in theſe you muſt not expect a deciſion. As whether the Infallibility reſt in the diffuſive Church, or in the Council, or in the Pope, which is a great thing to be reſolved in, and hot Conteſts have been about it. It is alſo of great concern whether Grace be efficacious of it ſelf, or only when the Will chuſes to make good uſe of it; and about this there have been ſharp diſputes. Great complaints are alſo made by men of much learning and worth in your Church, againſt a corruption of Morals, and all Political Government, which approved Doctors and Caſuiſts in your Church have publickly taught and printed, with licence: which deſerves to be condemned by publick authority as well as confuted by private Doctors, and Cenſured by ſome Civil Judicatories. But for all theſe reaſons we are not like to ſee another general Council in this Age. Suffer me therefore to ask you in this long interval of Councils, whether there be any Infallible Judge of Controverſies, or not? If not, then all your high pretences vaniſh; if there be one, he can be no other than the Pope, and if you make the Popes Infallible in the interval of Councils, as there is no neceſſity of them, ſince we have already an Infallible Judge, ſo it were an inexcuſable folly in the Popes to call a Council if the world acknowledge them Infallible.

20. I muſt ask one Queſtion more about this general Council: you tell me, *None but Biſhops have a deciſſive Vote in it*; How then ſhall I know when there is a general Council? For the Intention of the Prieſt

is by your Doctrines neceſſary to the Sacrament, how then ſhall I know if the pretended Biſhops were baptized by one that intended to do it, or not? And how ſhall I know that they received Orders from one that gave them with a right Intention? And yet all this is neceſſary before I can acknowledge them Biſhops: Nor muſt this be known only in this one Inſtance, though even that depending on the ſacred thoughts of the Prieſt, which are known to God alone, is a thing wherein I can never hope to arrive at any certainty; but I muſt drive up the ſame queſtion through the whole ſucceſſion to the very days of the Apoſtles, for if one Link of the Chain fails, the whole falls aſunder: Since any one that was either baptized, or had orders from any who did not intend it is neither a Chriſtian, nor a Biſhop, by your Doctrines. And all who are either baptized, or ordained, by one who is neither Chriſtian, nor Biſhop, are neither Chriſtians nor Clergy men. Here is a difficulty in my way, that were all the other removed, I cannot ſee how it can poſſibly be cleared.

21. Having now tried your patience with ſome troubleſome queſtions about your Church in general, I came to be ſatisfied in ſome particulars that ſtick with me concerning the Pope, to whom I ſee you muſt either yield an abſolute Authority, or be without an Infallible Judge of Controverſies. And let me firſt apply my laſt Queſtion to the Pope, and ask how you know that all your Popes have been Chriſtians, Prieſts, and Biſhops? Since this depends on the Intention. So that for ought appears to me you may

may acknowledge for the head of your Church. one who is neither a Christian, nor in Orders. If then my Faith must be resolved into the Popes Authority I am sure it rests on a sandy foundation, since I cannot be assured he is truly Pope. And let me ask you, Do you think that with any colour of reason it can be doubted, that there was never an Atheistical Priest or Bishop in the Christian Church, whose Intention went not along with the Sacrament? I am told that in *Spain* many pretended Priests are discovered to be Jews; and sure these when they baptise will be far from joyning their Intention with that Sacrament. So here I stick in the first step, and must do so still except you can help me forward.

22. How shall I know who is Canonically Elected? The Canon Law declares all Symoniacal Ordinations to be null; and Pope *Julius* the Second, by a Bull *de Symoniaca Papæ Electione*, declares him no Pope that is so elected. How then shall I know that in the Elections there was no Symony? For except I be sure there was none, I cannot be sure the Pope is Canonically elected. Now the secret transactions of the Conclave cannot be so clearly known as to free all people from scruples in this particular. On the contrary, we have the shrewdest grounds can be, for suspecting foul dealings in these Elections. Does not all the world know what interest the Factions of the two Crowns, of the Nephews, and the *Squadrone Volante* have in the Election of the Popes? And all have seen the Intrigue of that Affair, so that the very pretence of any Infallibility after such an

Election is baffled out of the World. Shall any body that underſtands mankind imagine theſe Elections go upon any other grounds but Intereſt, Faction, Expectation, or ſome ſuch baſe thing? And that after the Pope is thus choſen, to imagine the Holy Ghoſt is tied to all his Decrees, is ſuch a monſtrous piece of Impudence that I cannot have ſo little charity for you as to think any of you believe it.

23. How ſhall I know in the caſe of a Schiſm who is Canonically Elected? Many of thoſe Schiſms there have been, and all the Pretenders have put in a fair plea for themſelves. How then ſhall I be ſatisfied to which of them I muſt offer up my obedience? And you know there are not three Ages paſt ſince for above forty years the Church of *Rome* was a Monſter of two or three heads. The ſeveral States of *Europe* being as divided in their Obedience, as the Cardinals were in their Elections. And it is little to be doubted but in many other Counter Elections, had the Anti Popes been as ſtrongly ſupported as the Popes at *Avignon* were, they had been longer lived than they were. Let me alſo ask you, What right have the Cardinals to the Election of the Pope? Which by the Primitive Conſtitution ſhould belong to the Presbiters of *Rome*, and the Biſhops of the Province. But that Biſhops of other Nations ſhall be made Titulars to the Churches of *Rome*, and ſo carry the Election, as it is a very recent Conſtitution, ſo can it pretend to no Divine Warrant. And if the Election belong to the Cardinals, you can give no reaſon why two thirds are neceſſary to make a Pope; for in ſuch caſes either the whole

muſt

must agree, or the major Vote carry it; and if the last be true, then many a Pope is cast who is canonically elected, having the majority of the Votes for him. I confess in Political Constitutions men may mould matters as they will; but in Divine things, especially in choosing the Head of the Church and the Infallible Judg, I must expect a better warrant.

24. The Popes, if infallible, must either be such by immediate Inspiration, or by a direction of the Divine Grace, in considering what is proposed to them. To the former they do not pretend, nor do they wait for Enthusiasms, but proceed as other men upon all emergents. Now how can I be perswaded that a man who is wholly possest with affairs of State, who minds nothing more than intrigues, who has no education in any part of litterature, but the Canon Law, can upon a slight hearing a Controversie, which puzles the most refined speculative heads, judg exactly and truly, when I plainly see he does not understand the points in debate. And that this must be expected at *Rome*, I remit to all who know that Court: and it was truly the case of the Propositions of *Jansenius*, which *P. Innocent* condemned, though he confessed he understood not the matter, and never gave the *Jansenists* a hearing but once: nor can any body read the Bulls of the Popes, but he must see the grossest misapplications of Scripture, the falsest conclusions, and the weakest reasons imaginable. It were easie to instance this in a thousand particulars, which must needs occur to every one that reads them. Now a man may as soon believe

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day is night, and night day, as think that man infallible in his Decisions, whom he finds plainly mistaken in many easie obvious things.

25. What reason have I to think he has the Holy Ghost certainly going along in all his Decrees, who seems plainly to have little or no sense of piety or vertue in all his actions and whole deportment. The Divine Spirit purifies as well as enlightens: it is true in immediate Inspirations this is not a constant Maxime; but in one who expects the direction of the Holy Ghost by Prayers, Fastings, Applications of mind, and other such means, which is acknowledged to be the Popes case, he must have prepared his mind to a right sense of Divine things by the previous purifying his soul, otherwise a false Judgment is to be expected from a corrupt mind. And the Prayers of the wicked and their Fastings too are abomination to God. Now what men many of your Popes have been, I rather refer you to your own Historians than rake such a puddle: and since it is not to be disputed, but vices of all sorts have been eminently lodged in the persons of not a few Popes, who can force himself to think them a race of men that hold so near and close correspondence with Almighty God, as to have his Spirit alway at command, and yet have not by all that intimacy learned to escape the grosser and more common pollutions of the flesh. Though St. *Peter* tells us that is the way to become partakers of the Divine Nature.

26. How can I think the Popes infallible, when it is certain, if any thing in History be so, that many

many of them have been guilty of opinions which General Councils have condemned and anathematiſed? The Stories of *Liberius* and *Honorius* are too well known to be much conteſted, the one having conſented to ſemi-Arrianiſm againſt the *Nicene* Creed, the other being anathematiſed by a General Council (where another Popes Legats were conſenting) for a Heretick. I ſuppoſe you are acquainted with the Hiſtory, and therefore give but a hint of theſe paſſages, which are well known to learned men. I name not many other Popes whom Hiſtorians accuſe of Hereſie, but ſtand upon theſe two as more noted and ſignal: And if one Pope be a Heretick the whole *Infallibility* falls to the ground: and when I ſee Pope *Innocent* the Firſt, and Pope *Innocent* the Tenth differing ſo widely in their Decrees, the one confirming St. *Auſtin*'s Doctrin in the matter of grace, and the other condemning Propoſitions, which all who ever read St. *Auſtin*, and are ingenious, muſt ſee to be plainly conſonant to his opinions; I cannot forbear thinking neither one nor the other infallible; for of two that contradict other, I am ſure one is in the wrong, and if either of them be in the wrong, neither of them is infallible.

27. Is the Pope infallible in all he ſays, or onely when he gives out of his Chair his Deciſion of Controverſies? I know you chooſe the latter: but then let me ask you what is neceſſary to put him in his Chair, Muſt the Cardinals concur, then you ſhare the *Infallibility* among them, without any colours either from Scripture or Antiquity: Nor do I believe your Popes will allow this in their Deciſions, what

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ever they may do in the Political Government of the Eccleſiaſtical State: By what means therefore ſhall I be aſſured the Pope ſpeaks from his Chair, that ſo I may acknowledg him infallible: and if in any thing I muſt ſubmit to his ſentence, then moſt eſpecially when he according to the Decree of a Council, takes care to publiſh a Bible, which muſt be by all Chriſtians ſubmitted to as the Rule of Faith, and ſet up as the Standard by which all other Tranſlations, Copies, nay, and the Originals of the Hebrew and Greek are to be compared. This is a weighty and conſiderable buſineſs as any can be, and yet we have ſeen *Sixtus* the Fifth publiſh a Bible with all the aſſurances could be, that it was an authentical and true Edition, requiring all Chriſtians to receive it as the Rule of their Faith; but upon this he dies, and his Succeſſor *Clement* the Eighth gives the World another Edition of the Bible, and impoſes it with the ſame Authority *Sixtus* did, and took all care to ſuppreſs the Copies of the former Edition, yet ſome eſcaped his induſtry. The difference of thoſe two Editions is ſuch, that the Catalogue of them makes up a Book; and any that has compared them will find that in many places the whole ſenſe is varied in theſe Editions. This is as clear an evidence as may be, that the Chair cannot make them infallible, who do ſo flatly contradict one another, and that in a matter of ſo high and ſo general concern.

28. What reaſon have I to believe the Biſhops of *Rome* infallible, or that they have an abſolute Juriſdiction over Chriſtendom, ſince I can find no traces of this in the beginning of Chriſtianity, though the

the defining it was then of great neceſſity? I find the Apoſtles all acting by an equal Commiſſion, as indeed it muſt be where all were inſpired with *infallible Illumination*: And why muſt I think that St. *Peter* left none of this *Infallibility* at *Antioch*, or *Alexandria*, but brought it all entire with him to *Rome*? And why was he ſo ſullen as not to name his Succeſſor, when our Saviour ſhewed him that he was to put off his Tabernacle ſhortly? Certainly it is hard to imagine that when he was writing his ſecond Epiſtle as his laſt Will and Teſtament, that though he had concealed till then who muſt ſucceed him, he ſhould not then have named him. I deny not but the Faith of the *Roman Church* was ſpoken of throughout the whole World, and that a Series of bleſſed and glorious Martyrs governed that See; yet even then, what ever reverence the eminence of the Imperial City, and their own more eminent qualities, procured them, the abſolute ſubmitting all things to their Deciſion, was not thought of. It is true the Fathers gloried much in the firſt Founders of that See, and in the worthy ſucceſſion derived down from them, but thought of nothing leſs then ſubjecting Chriſtendom to their Authority: Nor did the other Patriarchs pay any homage or ſubjection to them, but ſtill pleaded an equality of Juriſdiction, yielding them nothing but a bare precedence. It is a thing I will not here attempt to ſhew by what ſteps that See did degenerate from its firſt purity; nor how it mounted to that height of Authority in which it glories at preſent: but any who is acquainted with the Hiſtories and Writings of the firſt ſix

Ages, must needs confess that the Scene of the Church is quite altered from what it was then in this obedience which the World does now pay the Bishops of *Rome*.

29. What reverence can I pay a Succession of men who have plainly trampled on all Laws Divine and Humane? Who have pretended to an absolute Temporal Power, who have deposed as well as excommunicated Emperours, Kings, and other Princes, who have animated their Subjects to rebel against them, who have set on their neighbouring Princes to invade their Dominions, which they had rent by Civil Wars and Rebellions, and did for a Succession of many Ages fill Christendom with war, and cover it with blood? Nor are these excesses to be onely charged on some particular Popes as their personal faults, but they founding them on a pretence to an absolute Temporal Authority to which they laid claim, either they erred in that Decision, or not; if they erred, then they are not infallible; if they erred not, then though the Reformation has made them a little more cautious, yet still they are vested with the same power, and all these Decretals of Pope *Gregory* the Seventh are still in force, so that the Princes of Christendome are at the Popes mercy for their Crowns and Dominions, and are more obliged to the Reformation than they apprehend or acknowledg for the peaceable possession of their rights. But it is apparent the Popes still retain the same high thoughts, and onely wait an opportunity of executing them, as appear'd from the attempts of Pope *Paul* the Fifth on the State of *Venice*.

30. In

30. In the interval of the *Sede vacante*, who is Head of the Church? Is it a dead body without a head, or is it a Monſter of many heads? Does the Authority li edivided among the Cardinals, or have they none at all? You know the Conclave have been ſometimes very tedious in their Elections, the laſt continued divers months, and others have been ſhut up much longer; pray then ſatisfie me who has the Supreme Power of the Church all that while? If you veſt the Cardinals with it, then you ſet up a Presbytery to govern the Church: For the Cardinals as ſuch are the Presbyters of *Rome*: and thus before we are aware *Geneve* is tranſlated to *Rome*, and the *Scottiſh* Presbytery culminates in the *Vatican*, and governs the whole World.

31. If after theſe difficulties about the Authority of Pope and Council, you tell me the Infallibility of the Church reſts in the whole body, and is to be taken from the univerſally received Opinions, then what had become of me if I had lived when the whole World was become *Arrian*, and *Athanaſius* alone withſtood the ſtream? Certainly, I muſt have run with the Current, and may be ſhould not have known what to have anſwered thoſe who ſhould have asked me, Where was your Faith before *Alexander* and *Athanaſius*?

32. But upon the whole matter how ſhall I know what is either decreed by Councils, or Popes, or received by the body of Chriſtians? It is not to be expected I can go over the World to examine the belief of all Chriſtians: Nor can I examine all the Canons and Decrees of Councils, much leſs all the

Popes Decretals: Into what therefore must I resolve my Faith? You tell me, a living speaking Judge is necessary: but such a one is not to be had in every part of the World, therefore I must languish under great and constant uncertainties; otherwise I must resolve my faith into the Testimony of my Priest and Confessor. And thus all these pompous high sounding expressions of the *Infallible Catholick Church* do at length dwindle into this, that every one of your Communion must in all things believe what their Priest tells them, without inquiry. And in what a perplexity must they be when one Priest assures them one Opinion is the Doctrine of the Church, another tells them the plain contrary is the Doctrine of the Church. And this has fallen out in not a few cases betwixt the *Molinists* and *Jansenists*. So that upon the whole I cannot see how private persons can be satisfied what is the belief of the Church.

And now, Sir, after I have led you through a great many Thickets and Inclosures, I am afraid I leave you in a labyrinth, out of which I protest I cannot help you, but by advising you to break through or leap over these banks and hedges within which you have intangled your self. And therefore you must forgive me if I cannot follow you, unless I see you furnished with some thread to lead you out of that intricate Maze of difficulties, that must follow on your Opinions in these particulars. And I choose rather than ingage in so dangerous a passage to take the sacred Writings which you and I both acknowledge to be divine, and peruse them with all serious care, hoping that God will so direct me,

me, that if I be not wanting to my ſelf, I ſhall not err in any matter of ſalvation. You will find I have treated theſe Opinions I have conſidered with all poſſible fairneſs and modeſty of Stile; and indeed, the ſad proſpect I have of Chriſtendom, which is abuſed by ſuch colours into ſo many and great miſtakes, raiſes in me thoughts full of pity and commiſeration, and not of inſulting and ſcorn. If you ſend me any return to this, I ſhall expect the like fair dealing from you; and if you give me ſatisfying anſwers to theſe difficulties, you ſhall find that you deal with one over whom reaſon hath more Power, than either Education, Humour, or Intereſt. And ſo I bid you farewell.

FINIS.

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Errata.

Page 1. line 3. read *Infallibility*. pag. 2. l. 6. *birth-right*. pag. 3. l. 9. for *one* r. *an*. pag. 6. l. 3. for *derided* r. *decried*. pag. 9. l. 6. for *then* r. *their*. pag. 12. l. 13. for *means* r. *meanneſs*; l. 17. r. *Weſtward*. l. 19. r. *Prieſts*. p. 24. l. 8. for *ſacred* r. *ſecret*. l. 25. r. *come*.